



## Marine Veteran of Fallujah Honored for Bravery by Iowa Legislature

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By Nathaniel R. Helms

Des Moines, Iowa - With his ailing father at his side United States Marine Corps 1st Sergeant Brad Kasal stood at attention last Monday afternoon in the state capital building to hear both houses of the Iowa legislature laud his courage, honor, sacrifice during his almost 21 years of service. Kasal was an Iowa farm boy and standout athlete in his tiny hometown of Afton before he joined the Marine Corps and became a modern legend for his remarkable fighting ability. Known as Robo-Grunt by his Marines, Kasal was shot seven times and struck by more than 40 pieces of grenade shrapnel during the battle for Fallujah in November, 2004.

The 39-year-old Marine – who has been selected for Sergeant-Major - earned worldwide recognition when a picture of him being carried from the scene of a hand-to-hand confrontation with a band of insurgents was flashed around the world. The jihadists ambushed a team Kasal was leading to rescue three fallen Marines trapped in a building when the firefight erupted on November 13, 2004. One Marine died and six others from Weapons Company and Kilo Company, Third Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, were wounded during the 90-minute fight that raged at ranges of less than 15 feet. None of the insurgents – estimated at 10 to 12 foreign fighters - survived the encounter.

The fight was already underway when Kasal encountered a bearded, heavily armed insurgent at point-blank range inside the small concrete and stucco Fallujah residence. Kasal was searching a small room in the building when he detected the jihadist preparing to shoot him in the chest with his assault rifle. Kasal managed to avoid the enemy's burst of fire and forced his weapon over the insurgent's arms until it touched his chest. The 18-year infantry veteran then pumped at least eight 5.56 rounds into the insurgent's chest and two more into his forehead while they grappled face to face.

"He was so full of drugs he was still twitching and his eyeballs were still rolling around in his head for the entire time we were in the building," Kasal remembered. "The insurgents are not freedom fighters, they are not soldiers; they are terrorists who depend on drugs so they can take at least one American with them before they die. They don't deserve to be called soldiers."

R. Kasal accepting congratulations from unidentified legislator during ceremonies. Picture by Nat Helms

During the close-quarters encounter Kasal and 23-year-old Lance Corporal Alex Nicoll were repeatedly shot by an unknown number of drugged up insurgents armed with grenades and AK-47 assault rifles who held the upper floor of the house they had occupied and another next door. Eventually both men were shot from behind in a burst of automatic weapons fire that completely severed Nicoll's right leg below the knee and cut Kasal's right leg almost in half in about the same place. Nicoll was shot a second time in the stomach and Kasal was shot in the buttocks while he was pulling the wounded Marines to safety. Despite his wounds Kasal managed to drag Nicoll to the relative safety of the small room where he had killed the insurgent moments before. There he continued to duel with the remaining insurgents and try to help Nicoll until an enemy fragmentation grenade landed a few feet away and blasted Kasal full of holes when he used his body to shield the younger Marine.

While Kasal was dragging Nicoll to safety Corporal R. J. Mitchell returned from another part of the building to help when he was taken under automatic weapons fire. While he was dodging the spattering AK rounds the grenade that injured Kasal and Nicoll also wounded Mitchell in the arm and damaged his rifle. Eventually all three men found themselves pinned down in the five-foot wide room while Kasal and Mitchell tried to bandage Nicoll and apply a tourniquet to his severed leg to prevent him from bleeding to death. The area where they were making their stand was so small Kasal was forced to lie on his back with his feet on the still-twitching insurgent so he could guard the doorway. Eventually Mitchell – who is also from Iowa - managed to summon help using his radio.

Concerned that relieving Marines would hear the noise they were making and assume the wounded Marines were insurgents, Kasal propped his rifle in the doorway of the tiny room to mark their position and drew his 9mm to make a final stand.

"I was worried about a friendly fire incident," Kasal said. "I was afraid they would hear the noise and come in firing."

The three wounded Marines remained pinned down by insurgents who raked their tenuous position from above and behind them until help arrived. Before the fight was finished about 90 minutes after it began Kasal lost sixty percent of his blood, Nicoll lost his right leg, and Mitchell lay bleeding from a wound to his arm. Despite their tenuous position, wounds, and shortage of bandages none of the men ever thought they would be left behind.

"Marines don't leave Marines behind," Kasal said.

Kasal is still recovering from seven gunshot wounds and more than 40 grenade perforations he received during a close-quarters fight with insurgents in Fallujah, Iraq on Nov. 13, 2006. Photo by Nat Helms

Kasal was medivaced back to Bethesda Naval Hospital, Maryland after a five-day stay at the U.S. Army Hospital in Landstuhl, Germany where his condition was stabilized enough to allow him to fly back to the States. For the next year he underwent a series of remarkably painful procedures to put his shattered leg back together. The procedure required Kasal to literally screw his leg together a millimeter a day until it was again joined together where it had been shot apart. Although not yet completely healed and still walking with a cane, Kasal says he spends between six and eight hours a day working out to get back into shape so he can rejoin his Marines in 3/1, better known as the "Thundering Third."

Kasal has been mentioned in numerous published reports as a candidate for the Medal of Honor, a speculation he refuses to either consider or comment on. Officially the Marine Corps says it does not comment on awards working their way through the system.

The ceremony recognizing Kasal was arranged by state Sen. Charles Larson, Jr., an Army reservist and attorney who served a one-year tour of duty in Iraq. He is also the founder of "Families United for Our Troops and Their Mission."

In a brief, emotional speech before the assembly Kasal diminished his own role in the fierce battle while praising his fellow Marines.

"A lot of people ask why I did what I did. I'm a Marine. That's what I am expected to do," he told the spellbound audience after his sponsor told his remarkable story.

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